

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Brahman Express*

Sheep and Cattle exported to Israel in February 2019

Report 76, September 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 5,004 sheep and 2,649 cattle were loaded on the *MV Brahman Express* at the port of Fremantle on 7 and 8 February 2019. The vessel departed in the evening of 8 February 2019. The sheep and cattle were discharged at Eilat, Israel on 26 and 27 February 2019 making this a 21 day voyage.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel at Fremantle and remained on board until completion of discharge.

The mortality rate for sheep was 0.6% (30 mortalities) and for cattle was 0.08% (2 mortalities). These do not exceed the reportable mortality rates. The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from the observer. The summary has been approved by the observer who accompanied this voyage.

Implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter Documentation

Exporter arrangements were available to address procedures relating to livestock management from loading through to discharge and contingencies.

The exporter Heat Stress Risk Assessment (HSRA) and load plan were submitted to the department prior to departure as required. An additional space requirement for the sheep consignment was imposed. This meant that each animal had 17.5% in extra space as compared to the requirements under *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011 (ASEL)*.

Loading

The vessel had five decks and the sheep were loaded onto the entire area of Deck 5 and a portion of Deck 4. The cattle were housed on the remaining area of Deck 4 and Decks 1 – 3. By day 4, the pen spacing adjustments were completed. After loading, each of Decks 2 and 3 had 32 meters squared excess space above the ASEL requirements. The extra pen space on Decks 2 and 3 was used to facilitate further adjustments as required during the voyage. Some gates between pens were removed to amalgamate two pens to provide additional space and increase the availability to fodder and water.

Personnel

The Australian Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) was very experienced and undertook their duties in a thorough and professional manner.

The LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) was very experienced and attended to the comfort and welfare of the livestock at all times.

The crew consisted of 28 personnel including the vessel executive. The Chief Officer (CO) and bosun were involved in regular deck inspections. The CO was proactive in conveying directions to the crew regarding daily feeding and watering requirements. The bosun was available at all times to assist the AAV and the stockperson throughout the voyage. The crew were available to relocate cattle or sheep if required for space or health issues.

The crew's daily tasks included the manual feeding, cleaning of water bowls and troughs, general maintenance and cleaning of the aisles.

The AAV was diligent in walking the decks and inspecting the animals for evidence of illness, injury or identifying shy feeders. Any animals identified were relocated to a hospital pen for treatment and assessment with particular attention paid to their bedding and nutrition requirements.

The stockperson had a regular routine of meticulous inspection of the decks each day and was proactive with the AAV to ensure that unwell or injured animals were removed from holding pens as soon as possible.

Daily routine

A meeting was held each day at 10:00am with the master, CO, bosun, AAV, stockperson and the observer. The meeting covered tasks for the day, resolution of any outstanding issues, weather conditions, voyage schedule, estimated arrival time, livestock mortalities, treatments, daily consumption of fodder and water and adjustments for the different weight classes of animals on each deck. The amount of fodder remaining on board, future fodder requirements and maintenance of the water supply were given the highest priority at every meeting.

The livestock were manually fed each day at 7:30am and 3:30pm, and chaff was provided to all the livestock every second day. Chaff was also prioritised for the hospital pens.

Night watch duties were assigned to groups of three crew that worked four hour shifts from 6:00pm until 6:00am the following day (two crew allocated to sheep and one person to cattle). The night watch crew monitored ventilation, cleaned the feed troughs as required, cleaned and flushed the water troughs, reported any concerns or urgent maintenance issues to the AAV, stockperson or the CO. The observer checked the night watch routine and found the crew were readily located and were monitoring their tasks as required.

Feed and water

The vessel has two reverse osmosis plants that produce water for the livestock. Water was supplied by automatic nose bowl to the cattle and the sheep were provided with water manually by the crew. The observer noted the monitoring and maintenance of the manual watering for sheep was given the highest priority by all personnel.

Every day, three crew members would work a 4 hour shift monitoring water supply. The water troughs were filled prior to the 7:00am feed and replenished when the livestock finished feeding. Similarly, the water troughs were filled prior to the 3:30pm feed and were monitored on a 24 hour basis. This included cleaning and priming of the cattle nose bowls. The sheep were supplied with a continuous supply of fresh and clean water throughout the voyage and the crew were diligent in undertaking this task.

Ventilation

The decks on the vessel were enclosed. The ventilation system supplied air in a downward direction to each pen from large tubular piping. The ventilation system was only capable of operating at one set output.

Throughout the entire voyage the weather was fine, seas were calm to moderate with only a couple of days when the seas approached rough. Temperature readings were taken daily from each deck at around 10:00am and 3:00pm. Temperatures were consistently measured at around 30 – 32°C and humidity of 80 - 86%. On entry into Eilat port, the temperature recorded was down to 25°C and 75% humidity.

Pen conditions

The build-up of the sheep pad over the course of the voyage was minimal with some progression from dry and crumbly to moist but never muddy or wet.

The pads in the cattle pens gradually built up and progressed from dry and crumbly to muddy and sticky and in some cases wet. The cattle decks were washed on days 7, 11, 14 and 16. Sawdust was spread in each cattle pen after the final wash.

Health and welfare

From the first day of loading in Fremantle with an ambient temperature of 33°C, the sheep exhibited an increased respiratory rate. The increased rate remained throughout the voyage. Temperature and humidity increased on entry into the Red Sea and respiratory rates also increased. However, no sheep were observed with open mouth panting. The cattle did not display symptoms of heat stress or elevated respiratory rate.

Early into the voyage, a routine calculation of fodder held in storage indicated a potential shortfall to cover the planned 18 day voyage. As a precaution, the daily quantity of fodder provided to the sheep was trimmed to ensure that sufficient fodder was available for the entire voyage. However, on day 14 a review of fodder in storage found there were sufficient supplies to allow an increase in the feeding regime to above the daily ASEL requirements.

Hospital pens were incorporated into pens used for holding healthy cattle to provide extra space. Hospital pens were readily established on all decks when required for unwell animals or shy feeders, lameness or conditions that required treatment with consideration given to appropriate bedding, spacing and available nutrition. All hospital pens were supplied with continuous chaff in addition to pellets.

The number of animals and their treatments were accurately recorded in the daily reports.

At all times, the crew were mindful of the welfare of the animals when carrying out their tasks, and always provided assistance to the AAV when required.

The AAV conducted post mortems to ascertain the cause of death as required. At no time were systemic type symptoms such as multiple cases of diarrhoea or coughing within a confined area observed.

There were 30 sheep mortalities with the cause of death mostly attributed to inanition and respiratory disease. During the voyage, sheep were treated for respiratory disease, lameness, shy feeders and pink eye.

There were two mortalities in the cattle during the voyage and the cause of death was not definitively established. During the voyage, cattle were treated for lameness, respiratory disease, shy feeders and pink eye.

Discharge

During the discharge, the ramps were loaded with ample sawdust to ensure a non-slip surface. No animals were observed to slip, slide or fall during passage through the ramp. The unloading system was safe and efficient. The handlers did not compromise the welfare of the livestock.

Conclusion

The observer noted the voyage proceeded smoothly with the benefit of fine weather and moderate seas. The AAV and the stockperson monitored the livestock in a meticulous professional manner.

The exporter identified the issue of the potential shortfall of fodder to the department on day 6 of the voyage. They were able to provide evidence to demonstrate fodder was loaded in compliance with ASEL and provided updates throughout the voyage. The fodder was managed to enable adequate feeding for the entire voyage.

The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 4 sheep in pen – no issues identified



Day 7 cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 12 cattle in pen - no issues identified



Day 13 sheep in pen – no issues identified



Day 18 cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 20 sheep in pen – no issues identified

